

What a Soapbox Derby and a 14-Year-Old Means to Your Success

By Will Newman

Daniel's face beamed as he neared the finish line of my town's first soapbox derby last week.

He'd been working for four weeks with a mentor (not me; I concentrate on his academics) to build the car. Painted it black. Tricked it out. And spent time practicing on a challenging mountain road.

Daniel was happy not because he thought he'd won. He didn't know at that point. But because his run down the much-easier course was the culmination of his turning his life around academically.

His turn-around is a lesson for us all.

Daniel is 14 years old, very small for his age, very intelligent, and often a challenge for his teachers. Early in the year, he'd slacked off on his schoolwork, especially math. I won't go into why. It's personal and not relevant. But the further behind he fell, the more depressed he got.

Sound familiar? Has this happened to you? You're determined to be a top-notch copywriter. You have the best training materials available — AWAI's. You started out passionate about your new career. (Still are, as a matter of fact.) And you're as committed to succeed as you've ever been.

But, somehow, life got in the way. You wanted to finish Chapter 5 by August 15th last year. So that had to go on hold when circumstances kept it from happening. And so did other goals. Until ...

Until you found yourself in a hole, just like Daniel.

The deeper he got in the hole, the harder it was to concentrate on schoolwork. The more depressed he got. The more he fell behind.

Then one day, he made a big step.

He didn't want to be the oldest boy in seventh grade next year, which he would have been if he failed. Taking one missing assignment at a time, he steadily worked himself up from an F to a high B. He's not stopping at a B. He's going to bust his butt over the next two weeks to bring his math grade up to an A.

If you're behind where you really want to be in your copywriting career, follow Daniel's strategy. When he started trying to pull himself out of the hole, it looked impossible. But he took it *one assignment at a time*.

Take it one step at a time ...

Don't worry about how many more chapters you have to finish in the program. Take it one chapter at a time.

Here's how Daniel kept his return on track. He had a list of every missing assignment. When he completed one and turned it in, he crossed it off his list.

Make your own list — perhaps from the Table of Contents of the program you've fallen behind in. Print it out. Put it up near where you work. Every time you finish a chapter, or achieve the next step, cross it out with a bold pen stroke. (Markers work great for this.)

About the time Daniel started moving out of his hole, is when he heard about the soapbox derby. He asked Mike to help him build his car. Without being obvious to Daniel, his mentor and I made working on the car dependent on getting assignments completed. Working with Mike was a reward.

For you, marking off each completed chapter in a program, or finishing one of the activities, is a good reward in itself. But treat yourself even better.

As you're moving upward, reinforce yourself. Now, it won't be building a soapbox derby car, I'm sure. But you know what it can be. Find something you want to do. When you hit a milestone — one you've determined ahead of time — give yourself that treat.

Find someone to keep you up and on track ...

Most important for Daniel — and for you — he constantly showed me how he was doing. Going from an F to a D to a C to a B and soon to an A. (I know!) Showing me how many assignments he'd turned in (and done well on). Getting my strokes for getting it done. And sometimes getting my crabbiness when he wanted to slack off.

Find someone who will help you in your quest to get back on track. If you're in COS, this could be one of your fellow COS group members. If you're not, find someone who really cares about your success in your new career. Ask them to check regularly on your progress. To support you. And to get you back on track if you slip off for a moment.

I have a confession to make. I could have talked to you today about how to get back on track if you've slipped off without talking about Daniel. But I had to tell you about him because I'm so proud of the way he's pulled himself back up. Just like you can do.

By the way, Daniel did win his age division — with the best time of all competitors!

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3 Responses to "What a Soapbox Derby and a 14-Year-Old Means to Your Success"

Thanks Will, great article! I have stopped and started a few times and you are right the passion is still there. It just seems like life can get in the way. I finally found a niche that I am passionate about and I can't wait to get started!

Guest (Michelle Durham) – over a year ago

Fantastic and inspirational article, Will! Thank you so much. And congrats to your son--I bet he gets that "A" because momentum is hard to stop.

Guest (Jeff) – over a year ago

Motivation comes in many forms. Mine is 120 credits and I have 94 so far. I take it one class at a time. then I will finish this B2B course, same way and then possibly my MA. Keep on plugging.

PatriciaPjrs – over a year ago

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